



NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Office of the Secretary

Contact: Paul Bledsoe (202)208-6416

For release: October 2, 1998

**BABBITT COMMEMORATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF WILD AND SCENIC
RIVERS ACT WATER TESTING PROTECTED RIVER;
ANNOUNCES PROJECT TO FURTHER PROTECT LAMPREY RIVER FISH
Comments from Vice President Gore on Wild and Scenic
Rivers Anniversary**

October 2, 1998, Washington, D.C. -- U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt was in Durham, N.H. today to celebrate with local conservation and community leaders the 30th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and to announce a project to open up spawning habitat for American shad, striped bass and other anadromous fish along the river. In addition, Vice President Al Gore sent a special message commemorating the anniversary of this landmark environmental legislation.

"Rivers have always been the bloodlines of our nation, main arteries of our social, economic and natural life," Babbitt said. "But by the mid-1960's, many were sclerotic, clogged and polluted to the point where we had forgotten their vital role in our national character and natural health. The passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was a watershed moment, helping to turn the tide toward a developing recognition that protection of our waterways is deeply bound up not only with protection of our wildlife and water quality, but with our connection to our natural landscape and heritage."

Signed by President Johnson on October 2, 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act protects river segments which contain remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, and cultural values. To date, 155 river segments, in 36 states have been designated as National Wild and Scenic Rivers, totaling almost 11,000 miles in length. These protected rivers range from the mighty Missouri to the Lamprey River in Durham, which had its designation signed into law in 1996 and which Babbitt water-tested Friday.

Vice President Gore noted from Washington, "The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act became law at a crucial time in our natural history, when our nation's waterways were severely degraded and getting worse. It helped inaugurate a generation of our most important environmental protection laws -- including the Clean Water Act in 1972 and the Endangered Species Act in 1973 -- laws which have helped clean up and protect rivers across the nation. Just this year, President Clinton and I designated 14 waterways as American Heritage Rivers, providing assistance to voluntary community-driven efforts to restore riverfronts. We have also urged Congress to fund our Clean Water Action Plan, a program calling for a new generation of water quality protections, assisting

states and landowners so that we can clean up our rivers many of which are still too polluted for fishing or swimming. Our work is not done. But the 30th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act reminds us that with determination we can continue to restore and protect our natural heritage and environment for generations to come."

Babbitt also announced today his support for a proposed project to open up 43 miles of river habitat on the Lamprey River which is crucial to the restoration of runs of river herring, American shad, American eel, and striped bass. The project will involve construction of a fish ladder at Wiswall Dam, where Babbitt made his announcement today, to allow passage of fish to spawning grounds. The project planners hope to begin construction next fall and complete it in 2001. The overall costs of the project would be approximately \$600,000, with \$500,000 coming from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The 30th anniversary of one of the most important pieces of Federal legislation ever passed to protect rivers -- the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 -- will be celebrated across America from October 1 to October 12. Events ranging from river clean-ups and hikes to festivals and symposia will be held along many of the Nation's designated wild and scenic rivers.

For the past 30 years wild and scenic rivers have become an increasingly important part of America's protected heritage, offering recreational and tourism opportunities to the public, protection for otherwise threatened plant and animal species, and dependable supplies of clean water for local use. Passage of the Act has stimulated an increasing public interest in river protection and provided an important tool for achieving it nationwide.

Key principles of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act which help protect these remarkable rivers include:

- Keeping the designated river segments free-flowing
- Protecting and enhancing outstanding natural cultural, and recreational values
- Allowing appropriate economic uses of the rivers
- Building enduring partnerships among all affected parties: especially local communities, state agencies, landowners, river users, and tribal governments.

The National Park Service helps build the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System three ways:(1) by carrying out feasibility studies for those rivers and river segments requested for study by Congress or state governors, (2) offering technical assistance to river partners to enhance these river corridors, and (3) operating 20 river segments as units of the National Park System. Examples include the Charley River in Alaska and the Bluestone River in West Virginia.

The National Park Service plays several roles in studying, assessing, and operating wild and scenic rivers -- in close partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the USDA Forest Service, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. States also play an important role by administering rivers designated by the Federal Government but operated through state authorities. For more information about the Wild and Scenic River System, contact John Haubert at (202) 208-4290 or Chris Brown at (202) 565-1175.

-FWS-